

Three's company

Jennifer Reischel describes her experience taking part in Best of Three, an innovative challenge where teams perform different takes on new writing pieces, audience members vote with their wallets and the winning group takes home cash

“Who is the underdog? Which team will have to up their paces to out-act the others and win back favourable points from the judges? And most importantly, which team’s cash box will be most looked after by the audience?” Welcome to Best of Three, a new concept in the long line of “how can I get seen and noticed” fringe ventures pursued by and organised for actors.

Indulging myself on one too many Easter eggs and flicking through my favourite web pages, I came across their ad for an acting competition promising to showcase actors performing scenes of new writing to industry figures and like-minded souls. Startlingly, it even mentions “M for Money”. Intrigued by the chance to interpret some original material and always on the lookout for opportunities to mention in my monthly graduates newsletter, I contacted some acting pals to join me, sent in my application and was confirmed to take part a few days later.

have approximately three weeks to rehearse and perfect these, before performing their efforts in three rounds in a room above a pub near London Bridge station – limited to three chairs on the stage. So far so good, and, as their website promises, it sounds like a mutual self-help concept.

Audience members, including three judges who are volunteers from the audience, vote in each team’s respective box with hard cash. The team that earns the most dosh takes home their entire box, the runner-up receives half of theirs and the third (losing) team misses out on performing the final (longest) scene – and goes home empty-handed. Before I muse on any further and to obtain a plausible stance of objectivity, let me give you a quick run-down of my team’s fate – we came last, hence earned no money that evening.

Scenes arrived in my inbox, varying in length between three, six and nine minutes. Rehearsals commenced and the read-through took place at a cafe by the Tower of London, gathering a rather uninvited yet amused

evening. Completing a last-minute line-run, we subsequently crammed into the makeshift 2x2ft storage cupboard/changing room.

As the place filled, I realised we were very possibly at a disadvantage, having kept our appearance rather quiet and boasting a mere two – not even three – supporters to witness our Best of Three debut, while the other teams had secured themselves ample tables of cheering friends with ready pockets.

The show started and ran like clockwork – any group running over their time limit was cut off and unapologetically reminded that this would result in minus points. This only heightened the already electric atmosphere created by the sheer curiosity among all participants to discover the varying interpretations given to the allocated scripts.

The judges commented thoroughly after each take, though I do wonder whether it would have made more sense to select the panel differently. The question stands – can an acting

competition be accurately judged if the reviewers are on familiar ground with the team members? Or would handing any decisions in respect to voting and winnings solely over to three neutral judges – with the audience donating throughout the evening towards one, main cash box – make the whole affair more impartial?

On the other hand, our business is all about popularity and the names that put bums on seats get the jobs, so maybe Best of Three is merely a mini-representation of the ever-popular and growing Britain’s Got Talent and X Factor phenomenon.

Whichever line of thought one may follow, the Best of Three experience is certainly a crash course for graduates and young actors in the demands of delivering a diverse assortment of characters and contrasting scripts in a competitive setting. *Jennifer Reischel is a performer, author and editor of The Stage’s Grad’s Club newsletter. For more on Best of Three, see www.bestofthree.net*

The screenshot shows the website for the 'pure solo/stage competition'. At the top, it says 'pure solo/stage competition' in a stylized font. Below that, there's a navigation menu with links for 'Home', 'Music Scores', 'Record', 'Competitions', 'Forum', 'Blog', and 'Help'. On the right side, there are buttons for 'Login' and 'Quick Register'. The overall design is simple and functional, typical of a niche website from that era.

